

You are what you eat

CATHERINE SAXELBY

Height: 178 centimetres

Weight: 63 kilograms

Age: 54

Eating plan: I always aim for half my lunch or dinner plate to be filled with salad or vegetables, one-quarter meat or fish and one-quarter potato, rice or pasta – that's healthy proportions. Generally, I have a higher protein intake with smaller servings of rice, pasta, bread – and only wholegrain or low GI [glycemic index] carbohydrates.

At a dinner party I would serve:

Perhaps a barbecue. I might even cook with cream. I'd always offer something healthy, like dips with carrots and celery sticks, and for dessert, I'd probably offer yoghurt instead of whipped cream.

I would never: Eat deep-fried and battered food or cook with pastry.

Is there more to healthy eating than avoiding chocolate and coffee?

Alex May talks to three nutrition experts about how they balance their diets (with the occasional glass of champagne).

Healthy eating: is it a lifesaving measure, like penicillin? Or an inedible, impossible-to-stick-with idea that unleashes untold devastation upon tastebuds everywhere? As our backsides spread ever larger – 54 per cent of Australians are overweight or obese (up from 38 per cent in 1989), according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics – we can learn plenty from the eating plans of nutrition experts such as Dr Sandra Cabot and Dr John Tickell and dietitian Catherine Saxelby.

Imagine having the willpower to refuse chocolate cake or to stop at just one glass of wine? Welcome to the world of healthy eating, where sticking to a healthy diet is never “easy” but becomes a way of life – or even a passion. “I’m an eccentric eater, but I’m also a control freak,” says Cabot, a doctor, naturopath and author of 1996’s bestselling *The Liver Cleansing Diet*. “It’s not easy to eat well but it’s easy to be passionate about eating well when you know it

means you can live longer and do more. Who wants Alzheimer’s disease or bad eyesight?”

“I don’t need to sit there eating muck all day,” says Tickell, a doctor and nutrition and longevity expert who appeared on the Nine Network’s *Celebrity Overhaul* but admits to his own food weaknesses. “The booze is the struggle. I used to need three or four glasses of wine but now I’m happy with one. I’m too old to drink bad red, so I only drink good stuff.”

It’s chocolate cake that Tickell cannot stand – even when it’s his own birthday cake. “Oh, it makes me feel sick,” he says. “My brother’s partner brought the cake for my birthday and said, ‘I know you’re a health nut but you have to have a piece.’ Yuck! I ate it to be polite but I visualised it filling up my coronary arteries and I stopped after two mouthfuls. Those arteries to our heart are only one-fifth the width of our little finger. Why do you want to clog that?”

Saxelby, who has written nine books about

cooking and healthy eating, including last year’s *Zest: Recipes For Vitality And Good Health*, has a more relaxed view, believing “the boring old balanced diet is the cornerstone to good health”.

No one, she says, ever wants to invite her over for dinner. “And if they do, they invariably tell me they really wanted to cook their double-chocolate whatever for dessert but changed their mind because they knew I would be there. Like all dietitians, I believe what you eat is the key to good health but if it was a special occasion like a dinner party, I might cook with cream or do something special. A good diet has to fit into people’s busy lives or they simply won’t eat it.”

Each expert has a different eating plan but all of them centre on eating healthy meals low in fat and packed with vegetables. Indulgences are allowed, but in small doses.

“Ice-cream is my comfort food,” says Cabot. “I usually stop at one scoop but sometimes I might →

Catherine Saxelby’s seven-day food diary

Breakfast Bowl of muesli with thick Greek yoghurt and low-fat milk.

Lunch (at cafe after bushwalk) Risotto with chicken and mushroom; rocket, pear and walnut salad; pink grapefruit drink with water; skim cappuccino.

Afternoon snack Slice of panettone; tea with milk.

Dinner Chicken tikka (her husband Dave’s signature dish); basmati rice; pappadams; water; fresh peach; a few grapes; Sleepytime caffeine-free tea.

Breakfast Toasted walnut bread with a scrape of butter; low-fat cheddar cheese; tea with skim milk.

Morning snack Four Vita-Weat crispbreads, low-fat cheddar cheese; tea with milk.

Lunch Salad of mixed leaves, cucumber, avocado and vinaigrette dressing; curried lamb meatballs (cold leftovers); tomato chutney; toasted walnut bread; water.

Dinner Grilled steak with caramelised onion, mash, green beans and broccoli; glass of pinot noir; few spoons of Greek rice pudding (bought at the local chicken shop); Sleepytime caffeine-free tea.

Breakfast Half a pawpaw; carton of passionfruit yoghurt.

Lunch Free-range chicken salad with avocado, fetta, sun-dried tomatoes, cos lettuce and shredded carrot (from Sumo Salad).

Afternoon snack Be Natural nut bar (“I always carry these with me. They are like a 50-gram serving of nuts and more filling than traditional muesli bars”); low-fat cappuccino.

Dinner Atlantic salmon with dill and lemon; broccoli and green beans; homemade potato wedges; wholemeal sourdough; glass of sauvignon blanc.

Breakfast Muesli with canned pears and low-fat milk; tea with milk.

Morning snack Fresh fruit platter; Metamucil smoothie (consumed at fibre supplement product launch: “It wasn’t as awful as it sounds”).

Lunch Be Natural nut bar.

Mid-afternoon snack Small wedge of brie cheese and one cracker; fresh fruit; tea with milk; samples of Curios breakfast snacks (at dietitians’ meeting: “I have a policy of trying every food I recommend”).

Dinner (at restaurant) Shared five Indian curries; plain rice; pappadams; herbed yoghurt dip; glass of riesling; water.

Breakfast Muesli with low-fat milk; tea with milk.

Morning snack Four Vita-Weats and peanut butter.

Lunch (at cafe) Spinach, roasted sweet potato, beetroot and goat’s cheese salad (“Yum”); sparkling mineral water.

Afternoon snack “No added sugar” chocolate bar – a sample from the US (“It was revolting”).

Dinner Macaroni bolognese; leaf salad with dressing.

Breakfast Muesli with half a banana and low-fat milk; tea with milk.

Morning snack Four Vita Weats and cheddar cheese.

Lunch Wholemeal sandwich with tuna, cucumber, lettuce and avocado; 250ml Nudie orange, mango and pineapple crushie.

Dinner Homemade burgers with tomato, onion, lettuce and beetroot; glass of pinot noir; ice-cream with sliced mango.

Early-morning snack Rockmelon and blueberries; half a banana.

Breakfast (at cafe) Poached egg with grilled tomato and spinach; grain toast; English breakfast tea with milk.

Late lunch Toasted banana bread with a little spread; skim cappuccino.

Dinner (at restaurant) Seared scallops; crusty white bread; grilled bream fillets with parsnip puree, artichoke hearts and rocket; green salad and dressing; glasses of sauvignon blanc.

DR JOHN TICKELL**Height:** 185 centimetres**Weight:** 80 kilograms**Age:** Pushing 60**Eating plan:** There are only two food groups – plant and non-plant. Eat two-thirds plant-based food and one-third non-plant food. Low HI (human interference) rather than worrying about low GI.**At a dinner party I would serve:**

Grilled fish and vegetables, French champagne, and mixed raspberries and blueberries with a big dollop of cream.

I would never: Eat processed food that comes out of a box.

have more. I can eat six or eight squares of dark chocolate but I know people who eat a whole block because they have a dysfunctional relationship with food. These people need counselling.” The 55-year-old lives on the fringes of Sydney, where she can grow her own herbs and salad vegetables.

“I like the apple scrolls they sell at the place I buy my cappuccino,” says Melbourne-based Tickell. “But they are the size of bloody footballs, so I buy one, take two bites and throw the rest away.”

Saxelby’s weakness is good wine. “I’ve just put on a few kilos after being in France. Eating three-course meals every day and drinking wine was wonderful but now my clothes are a bit tight. I can’t resist a good glass of wine.”

These nutrition experts have not always been healthy eaters. In fact, Tickell only started eating well after he began researching long-lived races such as the Okinawans (who live on an island off Japan) and Sardinians in the 1970s. “I’d stopped playing [professional] football and wondered why I was packing on the weight. Gee, I wonder: I was eating biscuits all day, stressed out of my head working as a suburban GP.” His wife, Sue, does most of the shopping and cooking, preparing a fruit platter every day and between seven and 10 vegetables with each evening meal.

Saxelby says she struggled with body image in her teens – “I always thought I was fat but when I look at the photos, I realise I wasn’t” – and began studying dietetics and nutrition after completing her science degree. “I’ve been on all kinds of diets – they make you do that at university, so you have sympathy for your clients – and I’ve discovered that most of them take too much time to shop or cook for. I had to stop the Atkins diet after three days when I was craving fruit and bread.” →

John Tickell’s seven-day food diary

Breakfast Glass of water; two Weet-Bix with mix of soy and skim milk (“I used to hate the taste of soy, so I mixed it with real milk); slices of fruit from “FP100” (“It’s a fruit platter I have in the fridge 100 per cent of the time so I can always snack on fresh fruit”); green tea (“Much higher in antioxidants than black tea”).

Morning snack Skinny cappuccino; raisin toast (no butter); two prunes; six to eight almonds.

Lunch Minestrone soup; grain toast.

Afternoon snack Three spoons of low-fat yoghurt; one apricot; six to eight pistachio nuts.

Dinner Grilled flathead tails with vegetables (“We have between seven and 10 different vegies every night”).

Breakfast Two Weet-Bix with soy/skim milk; fruit from FP100; green tea. **Morning snack** A Trimshot in soy milk (“Made with flaxseed, psyllium husks and antioxidants, these sachets are not a meal replacement but will kill your appetite for two to three hours”).

Lunch (at cafe) Two poached eggs on grain toast (“I only ever eat one-quarter of an egg yolk – give the rest to your dog so he can have the heart attack”); grilled tomato; a few baked beans.

Afternoon snack Half a piece of grain toast with hummus; two spoons of yoghurt.

Dinner (at restaurant) Whole grilled snapper; vegetables; glass of red wine.

Breakfast One Weet-Bix with fruit; banana; green tea. **Morning snack** (at conference) Coffee; a fruit flan (“The other options were chocolate brownies and Danish pastries”).

Lunch Small can of red salmon; salad; piece of grain toast.

Afternoon snack A Trimshot in soy milk; a plum.

Dinner Two beers; kangaroo fillets with vegetables (“Kangaroo is the best red meat you can get. It’s grass-fed and has low fat content but it does need to be cooked quickly in a hot pan”); blueberries and raspberries; chocolate cake (for his birthday: “I could only eat two spoonfuls – too sickly”); glass of red wine.

Breakfast One Weet-Bix with soy/skim milk and sprinkled with oats (“a super grain that soaks up all the cholesterol”); fruit; green tea.

Morning snack Cappuccino; slice of smoked salmon on grain bread.

Lunch Mixed bean salad.

Afternoon snack Trimshot; grapes.

Dinner Spaghetti with seafood; roasted vegetables.

Breakfast (in the Qantas Lounge) Bircher muesli with yoghurt; slices of melon, pineapple, orange; green tea.

Morning snack (on flight) Water; ham and salad sandwich; coffee.

Late lunch (at airport) Vegetable pastie and tomato sauce; small tub of low-fat yoghurt; water.

Dinner (at restaurant) Grilled fish and vegetables; glass of red wine.

Midnight snack Three squares of dark chocolate; half a banana.

Breakfast One Weet-Bix with soy/skim milk; a fig; stewed plum; slice of pineapple; walnuts; green tea; one poached egg (one-quarter of the yolk); grilled tomato; baked beans.

Morning snack (at conference) Cappuccino; Anzac biscuit.

Lunch (at conference) White roll with cheese, tomato, cucumber and bean shoots; nectarine; orange juice.

Afternoon snack (on plane) Apple; cashew nuts.

Dinner Sardines; vegetable stir-fry.

Breakfast Two Weet-Bix with soy/skim milk; fruit; green tea.

Morning snack Grain toast with Vegemite; grapes; two prunes; coffee.

Lunch Small can of red salmon; baked beans (“You’ve got to eat as many beans as you can. Races of people who still eat beans – usually in less-developed countries – don’t have the same cancer problems we have”); tomato on grain toast.

Afternoon snack Slice of tasty cheese; handful of nuts and goji berries (“These are power packs of antioxidants”).

Dinner (at restaurant) Grilled blue-eye and fillet steak with vegetables (shared with wife); small sourdough roll with olive oil; a beer; glass of red wine.


DR SANDRA CABOT
Height: 172 centimetres

Weight: 56 kilograms

Age: 55

Eating plan: Eat more raw food, especially vegetable juices. Avoid sugar. Eat to boost liver and immune system function.

At a dinner party I would serve: I'd call in caterers and brief them to cook something healthy – then I'd make sure there were plenty of low-carb cocktails to keep the conversation flowing.

I would never: Eat food that had been cooked in a plastic container in a microwave – the radiation destroys the food.

The mother of two teenagers tries to sit down to a family meal when sporting activities are not on the schedule. “The most difficult time to eat well is when you’re cooking for a family. Children can be notoriously fussy eaters. When it’s like that, it’s easier to cook simple meals like lamb cutlets, peas and potatoes. Keep it basic.”

Cabot began her quest to eat healthily during her late 30s, when she was crippled by migraine headaches and an overloaded work schedule as a women’s health doctor. “I used to eat licorice all day. Some days, I’d only have Saos and Vegemite if there was nothing in the house,” Cabot says. “Eating well is not a habit I find easy but it’s become a passion. I have a passion to feel well every day and to treasure my body as a gift of the creator.” Each weekend, she mixes vegetable juice – “I always throw in herbs from my garden” – and freezes it in half-litre lots to defrost each night and drink for breakfast.

Tickell sticks to eating vegetables, lean meat and fish and plenty of fruit. “We have jars of nuts and things in the pantry all the time. Nuts are like little calorie bombs, so I only have six or eight, not 698. I quite like goji berries, too,” he says.

Goji berries, used in traditional Asian medicines, are said to be rich in vitamins and antioxidants. Health-food marketers say that goji berries can prevent cancer – yet no scientific research has proved the claims.

“Have you tried those things?” Saxelby exclaims when asked if she believes in superfoods such as goji berries. “They taste like grass clippings! I’m not prepared to pay \$80 a kilogram for goji berries until I see greater studies on it. I can buy cranberries, blueberries or strawberries for a fraction of the price.”

But does all this healthy eating ever get boring? Cabot admits she wouldn’t consume freshly squeezed vegetable juices or low-carb meals if she was on death row and given one last meal. “I wouldn’t eat – no way. I’d smoke a cigar, drink a cocktail and go out feeling good.” ●

Sandra Cabot’s seven-day food diary

Breakfast Fresh juice (orange, pineapple, lemon, mint, parsley, beetroot leaves); handful of nuts and dried apricots; two cups of freshly brewed black coffee.
Lunch Salad with tuna.
Dinner Three lamb loin chops with stir-fried vegetables in a sauce made with curry paste and tomato paste; three pieces of orange chocolate; two apples.

Breakfast Fresh juice (carrot, pineapple, lemon, mint, parsley, beetroot); small bowl of plain yoghurt with one tablespoon LSA (linseed, sunflower seeds and almond: “a ground powder that will boost liver function”); two cups of freshly brewed black coffee.
Lunch Rice cakes with tahini; apple.
Dinner Stir-fried vegetables with beans and chickpeas, curry paste and chilli; small serve of homemade chocolate coconut ice-cream (“I make ice-cream with Syndrome X powder, which contains Stevia, a sugar-substitute”).

Breakfast Fresh vegetable and fruit juice; coffee; bowl of raw nuts sprinkled with LSA.
Lunch Salad with salmon.
Dinner Vegetable and chickpea stir-fry in a sauce of olive oil, curry powder and tomato paste.

Breakfast Fresh vegetable and fruit juice; one banana; coffee (“Coffee is a healthy choice provided you moderate the dose – the liver has to break the coffee down so one or two cups is fine”); two squares of dark chocolate.
Lunch Four Sao biscuits with butter; leaf salad with parmesan cheese.
Dinner Four lamb chops; large leaf salad; sweet corn, peas and potatoes.

Breakfast Fresh vegetable and fruit juice; three scrambled organic eggs; coffee.
Lunch Canned salmon; one avocado with dressing made from lemon juice and balsamic vinegar; one orange.
Dinner Grilled Atlantic salmon; big salad; chocolate ice-cream cone (“If I don’t make the ice-cream myself, I buy the brands with no artificial colours or preservatives. Cheap ice-cream is full of bad things”); one glass of red wine.

Breakfast Fresh vegetable and fruit juice; two slices of toast with butter and apricot jam; coffee.
Lunch Big salad with lots of olives, avocado, olive oil and lemon juice; salmon (“I eat three to four serves of fish – sometimes salmon, sometimes sardines – each week. I need the omega-3 because I don’t want to get Alzheimer’s.”)
Dinner Omelet made with organic eggs and vegetables; two sweet corn cobs; two pieces fruit; four squares of dark chocolate.

Breakfast Fresh vegetable and fruit juice; three pieces of fruit; handful cashew nuts; coffee.
Lunch Toasted salmon and onion sandwich with butter on rye sourdough.
Dinner Stir-fried vegetables and lentils in a curry and tomato sauce; salad; vanilla ice-cream in a cone; one glass of red wine.